

# A Historical Digest of Early Chili



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Before there were any white men in what is now the Chili area, it was forest and the hunting grounds of the Seneca Indians. Although there were no major villages... The game was abundant, deer, turkey and many other animals roamed the forest, bears and wolves were sometimes unwelcome guests. The streams were full of fish, so the early settlers had many food sources.

The first land owner, in what is now Chili, was Peter Sheffer who arrived in 1789, and who purchased his land from Ebenezer Allen. Though he owned land in Chili, he actually lived in Wheatland...

The first recorded settler was Captain Joseph Morgan, and his family in 1792. He was a Revolutionary War Veteran like many of the early pioneers, and supplied seed to many of them. He purchased his land from Peter Sheffer in the Scottsville Road area, south of present Morgan Road. Morgan, was followed by Andrew Wortman in 1794, Stephen Peabody in 1794, and Leonard Widner in 1794. Josiah Fish settled at the mouth of Black Creek in 1794, and later became the first Supervisor of the old Town of Northampton. Henry Widener and his conclave of 11 adult children and step children arrived in 1796.

Stephen Peabody operated the first business in the Town of Chili, a distillery. Another early business was the Jacob Widener-Joseph Carey saw and grist mill. Comfort Smith's mill was close to the same location.

The first tavern was the Checkered Tavern, located at the present site of South Chili and was built by Henry Widener.

The first church was the Chili Presbyterian Church on Chili Avenue at Stottle Road, erected in 1832. Other businesses, etc., quickly followed, taverns, hotels, schools and other churches.

Most of the first settlers were German, and Belgian from the Penns, and New Jersey area, probably hearing of the area and its fertile land from returning soldiers of the Sullivans Expedition against the indians in 1779. They used the Williamson Road through Tioga to New Town (now Elmira) then followed the Sullivan Route from Kanadesago (now Geneva) to the Genesee River. Williamson was a land agent for Phelps and Gorham. After the War of 1812 there was a major immigration from the New England Yankees faction.

The first road was Scottsville Road, laid out by Peter and Jacob Sheffer in 1792. It ran from Oatka or Allens Creek to the falls of the Genesee River at present Rochester.

The first road to the interior was the Braddocks Bay Road. It ran from Braddocks Bay to the present Morgan Road, where it turned east to the river and Scottsville. The road is now known as Union Street.

In 1797 the first township was formed in this area. It was known as Northampton that ran from the Genesee River to Lake Erie. In 1808 the Town of Riga was formed from the Town of Northampton, included the present Town of Chili. On February 23, 1821 the County of Monroe was formed, and Riga was included in the county. On February 22, 1822 (Washington's Birthday) the present Town of Chili was formed from the Town of Riga. Joseph Sibley was the first Supervisor. He operated an early mill on Black Creek. That was later operated by Gertrude Hertz, probably the first woman miller. This property is now owned by William and Bea Wilcox, and is on the National Register of Historic Sites.

There are two theories on how Chili was named. The first theory was that it was named after Chile, South America by local people sympathetic to its cause during Chile's struggle for independence, and then was somehow mispronounced. Early authors, when using the theory always qualified their statements with maybe, perhaps, possibly, etc.

The second theory was that the Town of Chili was named after the Chiliast or Chilian religion. This was the religion of some of the earliest settlers in the South Chili area. They came from Pennsylvania and were of German, Dutch and Flemish origins. They believed in a thousand years of peace and the returning of the Lord. Chili meaning a thousand. They were often known as those \_\_\_\_\_ Chilians. There are many times when we are referred to in the same way today.

The first railroad was from Rochester to Buffalo in 1812, and the Old Genesee Valley Canal was opened in 1862, connecting Rochester to the Allegheny River. This was replaced by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

The first college was opened at North Chili in 1860, in a former tavern and stage stop on the northwest corner of Buffalo Road and Union Street. It was called Chesborough Seminary operated by B.T. Roberts. This was the beginning of Roberts Wesleyan College. One of the first students was Richard P. Hubbard. This old tavern and stage stop still is there today.

Early town offices were usually held at various homes. Now there are central town offices including a library, town garages, etc., these are located at 3235 Chili Avenue, and the population has grown to over 30,000.

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